

## **REFORMS IN PHILOSOPHY TEACHING IN UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES**

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**T**eaching philosophy is a large scale issue. For the purposes of this article one narrower topic will be discussed, and that is the teaching of philosophy in colleges and universities to young students who are in a new environment and are eager to explore humankind's grand treasures of knowledge.

*1. It is necessary to look closely at the situations in colleges to make reforms so as to catch up with the country's comprehensive renovations and to speed up the integration into the global economy.*

Colleges and universities have not been inadequately equipped with philosophical knowledge as has been realized by many philosophy lecturers and researchers among other people, especially students.

Apart from achievements so far in teaching philosophy, it should be admitted that a lot of warnings have been given to the fact that students majoring in philosophy do not like their choice and even worse, become fed up with Marx-Lenin modules in general. Many of them just learn to get passing marks, and few think of it as a way to train and improve their thinking or equip themselves learning methods. According to K. Marx and Hegels all human essence or what is helpful to their specialization later is "summarized" or "generalized". Thus,

there was a time when people talked bitterly about the modules which, "lecturers do not want to teach, and students do not want to learn!"

Does the society know this? Does the education industry know this? I am pretty sure that they all know it well, very well. If a social survey on learners' interests in Marx-Lenin modules is seriously conducted, we will certainly find figures that need more critical thinking and follow-up. People in charge have not dared to look directly at the students' lack of philosophical knowledge, or even the lecturers own shortcomings, thus the old curriculum remains in place.

For a broader view, it is easily seen that even teaching and researching staff who have been trained for years are encountering many professional difficulties and obstacles in using out-dated and unsystematic teaching methods in colleges and universities!

*2. So what is the reason for the fact that students are not interested in philosophy, especially Marx - Lenin modules? Is it the students fault?*

There is not a simple answer to that question, however with my own experience

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and observations, some of the followings reasons might be mentioned.

*First of all, it is not the students fault.* The very first thing to say is that students should not be blamed. At their age, students are fond of learning and generally want to equip themselves with knowledge in order to be intellectual. They need to study further and deeply, and then they can have their own choice about what to study with no one imposing.

*The second issue is quantity.* The philosophy curriculum in non-philosophy colleges and universities, particularly in natural sciences or technical colleges, is not small compared with their other major modules, in fact many leaders of natural sciences and technical colleges are complaining about the fact that philosophy counts for too much time in the curriculum. In reality, many subjects are being taught which lowers the number of hours for philosophy. Due to the limited time, even basic contents are cursory within the requirements and lecturers have no time to teach the concepts at all.

*The third issue is found with the curriculum and textbooks.*

The country is undergoing rapid changes and so is the world. Everyday, there are more new things in terms of technology and science, but philosophy is also part of the trend. Yet our curriculum is rigid and applied for all subjects in different specializations.

It is undeniable that all philosophy programs should meet basic and general education requirements, however it should be noted that if it is not suitable to the specialization trend than the module's attractiveness will be impossible to maintain. This is the reason why we still

have different textbooks for different study blocks under the same programme, and why philosophy has not been attractive enough to students.

Another big mistake is that schedule contents do not show students the history of the issue. K. Marx's opinions are sometimes cut or conversely explained to meet some requirements leading to Marx's being misunderstood and not-rightly-valued along with other great philosophers' who contributed to philosophy before their time. With such schedule contents, students are unable to see themselves with the revolutionary greatness embodied by K. Marx, and are unable to realize the diverse philosophical theories which have been discussed for generations. They also have no idea of the emerging problems attracting global concern, aching for philosophers' leadership, and thus fail to be provoked to think of new ideas for the younger generation to consider. In other words, we have made K. Marx stand aloof, which goes against reality and does him harm. More worrying, there is a tendency in which only politics and not philosophy is taught in colleges and universities. It is intended that all current Marx - Lenin modules in philosophy, political economy, scientific socialism, and Ho Chi Minh Thought will be presented in the form of principles which will be taught according to one consistent textbook over 75 periods. There have been no ideas of how people could do it, but it is not impossible to think of the consequences! Lessons from Foundation University are still there!

*The fourth issues lies with teaching methods.* Due to limited time, the rigidity and the lack of history in the schedule and program makes it difficult for, lecturers to cover some of the more basic concepts of

philosophy, mostly Marx philosophy. Thus, they often choose the safest and easiest ways to teach, that is to explain what is written in the general books for all subjects.

Besides this, examination styles, even newly introduced multiple choice examinations, not only force students to memorize without thinking or exploring things, but also forces lecturers to focus on content that can be examined without further research. Consequently, sluggishness and shallowness is unavoidable.

Another notable thing is that no effort has been made to improve teaching content or to enhance given knowledge. New things have not been updated and accessed, instead, theoretical philosophy points have been formularized and outlined. To some philosophical subjects, that deed is valuable to some extent, but such content is limited. There are thousands of thorough philosophical points which contain a lot of implications and explanations, from which whole schools of thought have emerged. For such points, it is not enough to explain normally, interpretation methods must be used in the hope of showing all the possible meanings. Thus, how can outlines and formulas avoid inadequacy and incorrectness!

There are abundant examples of this. For instance, it is impossible to avoid incorrectness when formularizing complex and incoherent points set by G. Berkeley, I. Kant, F. Hegels, or K. Marx's opinions such as, "religion is the opium of the people," "is the ensemble of the social relations!" Because of this dogmatic feature of teaching philosophy, some textbooks confirm that the subjective idealist G. Berkeley finally came to solipsism! Unfortunately, history tells a

different story because G. Berkeley actually wanted to avoid solipsism, though he had to argue as an objective idealist.

### **3. What should we do then?**

Firstly, it is necessary to identify the objectives of teaching philosophy in institutions of higher education. It is ultimately right that philosophy's mission is to equip students with the skills to form an outlook and methodology for further study. One regretful thing is that for a long time, because the established political stand, philosophy and politics were identified together. Philosophy is to serve politics, which is a concept everybody must know. But more importantly, philosophy should support politics and should be something politics is based upon. Philosophy works best not in explaining guidelines but by providing the foundation for guidelines to be set, by scientifically criticizing decisions before their implementation, and by establishing the people's confidence in guidelines by means of scientific convincement. Thus, apart from providing learners with knowledge, philosophy is expected to equip them with the right way to think and to use scientific methodologies. It is a big mistake to be dogmatic.

Secondly, Marxist philosophy does not stand aloof from human philosophy. It is the legal inheritance of the best of human philosophy. It will not stand still but keeps improving and upgrading after inheriting suitable features and integrating them into human thinking. Learners will not see the real value of Marxist philosophy in general and specifically Marx's doctorate thesis if they do not understand pre-Marx philosophy. F. Engels' points to, "Dialectics in the nature", V. I. Lenin's

“Philosophy notes,” and “Materialism and empirical criticism” which cannot be fully understood if Baruch Spinoza, Leibniz, and Denis Diderot’s philosophies are not first understood. Thus, “Marxist philosophy teaching should follow issues historically.” It also means philosophy programs should be redesigned in the form of philosophy history, which has been realized internationally and is one criterion that can help us integrate into the context of globalization. Certainly, Marxist philosophy will be given a priority in that program.

It is commonly known that habits, traditional concepts, and customs are difficult to change; even great obstacles might be on the way. However, expected accomplishments will not be achieved if we refuse to change our own thinking in order to change the dogmatic habit which keeps young people from developing their thinking. The success of our country’s renovation proves that. I consider this to be the most important milestone to be reached.

*Yet, changes should be made positively to facilitate improvement. Philosophy especially, must not be left out of tertiary education.*

When we have a programme with scientific content, suitable textbooks, and intelligent questions provoking further exploration to answer such questions, then lecturers will no longer have to totally rely on their textbooks to teach the students. This is a favorable condition for lecturers to promote their competence in guiding students to think about the core and the most profound means by which discussion, communication, and presentations among students and lecturers could be facilitated. This is more important to philosophy

lecturers if we wish to have a better generation.

Currently the less imposing and dogmatic modules can be used, the better. Particularly, philosophy should be a vehicle through which younger generations can facilitate their self learning, reading, and thinking, which can help them actively take part in social activities. It is also expected to help students adapt by encouraging them to find the real meaning of life, and to try to strive and train for it. This also helps to form their consciousness, that is, to raise their consciousness to a higher level.

Once teaching methods are changed, examination methods should also be changed to be suitable with the amount of time spent on self study, encouraging more creativity in students.

Fourthly, lecturers and students should be encouraged to directly read and research original works not only with textbooks, that is, not only through others’ view but for themselves as well. Many major points of great philosophers who studied Marxist philosophy were misinterpreted or incorrectly explained because if discussed in original words without context, they would go against what was wrongly considered as “mainstream.” For example, very important points set by K. Marx in the foreword of, “Contribution to criticize political economy faculty” was ignored or cut. Without our Party’s comprehensive renovation guidelines, great points of Marxist philosophy would not be fully quoted and would be subjectively explained.

Intellectual revolution has been talked about for 20 years but in terms of philosophy teaching and training it is too slow. It is not too early to talk about

philosophy teaching reform, still, what is important is how to make such reforms. Let us not leave out philosophy, especially the history of philosophy in tertiary education because of the pressure to reduce the study burden. If we see philosophy as philosophy history and “to study philosophy history is to study philosophy itself and it can not be different” (Hegels), we will understand the reasons why K. Marx’s doctorate thesis is about philosophy history, why Lenin considered philosophy history if being researched and modified dialectically the most important part forming dialectics and considered “Hegels’ dialectics... a generalization of ideology history” and consciousness theory, why Engels said, “A nationality, which is to stand on the summit of sciences should never be lack of theoretical thinking for even a minute.

However, theoretical thinking is an inborn feature in the form of people’s competence. Such competence should be completed and to complete it, till now, no other way except for studying philosophies of previous times.” To equip students, especially the younger generation, with philosophical knowledge is not to equip the world’s view and methodology but also the thinking of a culture.

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